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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No. 862.C2023

First Named Inventor or Application Identifier

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APPLICATION ELEMENTS

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.

1. ☐ Fee Transmittal Form
(Submit an original, and a duplicate for fee processing)2. ☐ Applicant claims small entity status.
See 37 CFR 1.27.3. ☒ Specification Total Pages 564. ☒ Drawing(s) (35 USC 113) Total Sheets 225. ☒ Oath or Declaration Total Pages 2a. ☒ Newly executed (original or copy)b. ☐ Copy from a prior application (37 CFR 1.63(d))
(for continuation/divisional with Box 17 completed)
[Note Box 6 below]i. ☐ DELETION OF INVENTOR(S)
Signed Statement attached deleting
inventor(s) named in the prior application, see
37 CFR 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).6. ☒ Application Data Sheet. See 37 CFR 1.76

ADDRESS TO:

7. ☐ CD-ROM or CD-R in duplicate, large table or Computer
Program (Appendix)8. ☐ Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission
(if applicable, all necessary)a. ☐ Computer Readable Form (CRF)

b. Specification Sequence Listing on:

i. ☐ CD-ROM or CD-R (2 copies); orii. ☐ paperc. ☐ Statements verifying identity of above copies

ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

9. ☒ Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))10. ☐ 37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement ☐ Power of Attorney
(when there is an assignee)11. ☐ English Translation Document (if applicable)12. ☐ Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 ☐ Copies of IDS Citations13. ☐ Preliminary Amendment14. ☒ Return Receipt Postcard (MPEP 503)
(Should be specifically itemized)15. ☐ Certified Copy of Priority Document(s)
(if foreign priority is claimed)16. ☐ Other: _____

17. If a CONTINUING APPLICATION, check appropriate box and supply the requisite information:

☐ Continuation ☐ Divisional ☐ Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No. ____/
Prior application information: Examiner _____ Group/Art Unit: _____

For CONTINUATION OR DIVISIONAL APPS only: The entire disclosure of the prior application, from which an oath or declaration is supplied under Box 5b, is considered a part of the disclosure of the accompanying continuation or divisional application and is hereby incorporated by reference. The incorporation can only be relied upon when a portion has been inadvertently omitted from the submitted application parts.

18. CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS

05514

☒ Customer Number or Bar Code Label

(Insert Customer No. or Attach bar code label here)

or ☐ Correspondence address below

NAME

Address

City

State

Zip Code

Country

Telephone

Fax

CLAIMS	(1) FOR	(2) NUMBER FILED	(3) NUMBER EXTRA	(4) RATE	(5) CALCULATIONS
	TOTAL CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(c))	18-20 =	0	X \$ 18.00 =	\$ -0-
	INDEPENDENT CLAIMS (37 CFR 1.16(b))	12-3 =	0	X \$ 80.00 =	\$ 720.00
	MULTIPLE DEPENDENT CLAIMS (if applicable) (37 CFR 1.16(d))			\$270.00 =	\$ -0-
				BASIC FEE (37 CFR 1.16(a))	\$ 710.00
				Total of above Calculations =	\$1430.00
	Reduction by 50% for filing by small entity (Note 37 CFR 1.9, 1.27, 1.28).				
	TOTAL =				\$1430.00

19. Small entity status

- a. ☐ A small entity statement is enclosed
- b. ☐ A small entity statement was filed in the prior nonprovisional application and such status is still proper and desired.
- c. ☐ Is no longer claimed.

20. ☒ A check in the amount of \$ 1430.00 to cover the filing fee is enclosed.

21. ☒ A check in the amount of \$ 40.00 to cover the recordal fee is enclosed.

22. The Commissioner is hereby authorized to credit overpayments or charge the following fees to Deposit Account No. 06-1205:

- a. ☒ Fees required under 37 CFR 1.16.
- b. ☒ Fees required under 37 CFR 1.17.
- c. ☐ Fees required under 37 CFR 1.18.

SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT, ATTORNEY, OR AGENT REQUIRED

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CORRESPONDENCE INFORMATION

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Country:: Japan
Priority Claimed:: Yes

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TITLE OF THE INVENTION

IMAGE PROCESSING METHOD AND APPARATUS

5

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

06678297 100306
This invention relates to an image processing
apparatus and method for converting a multilevel image
to a binary image. More particularly, the invention
10 relates to an image processing apparatus and method
capable of changing dot connectivity when binarization
is performed in dependence upon a parameter.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15

Many methods of binarizing multilevel image data in
order to output the data to a binary (bi-level) printer
such as an ink-jet printer have been proposed. One
binarization processing technique known in the art is
20 the error diffusion method, which is a method of
reproducing pseudo-halftones.

As disclosed in R.W. Floyd and L. Steinberg,
"Adaptive algorithm for spatial grey scale", SID Int.
Sym. Digest of Tech. Papers, p. 36-37 (1975), the error
25 diffusion method binarizes (converts to a maximum
density level or maximum contrast level) multilevel

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image data of a pixel of interest, weights the error between the binarized level and the multilevel data that prevailed prior to binarization and adds the weighted error to the data of pixels neighboring the pixel of interest.

An example of a generally known apparatus which uses such a binarization method is a copier having a plurality of printing elements which print in accordance with thermal transfer or ink-jet technology. Another example is an electrophotographic copier which uses light-emitting elements such as LEDs.

Such copiers have a reading unit equipped with an optoelectric transducer such as a CCD and convert a document image to an electric signal by causing the reading unit to scan the document. Printing is performed by driving a plurality of printing elements on a printhead based upon the electric signal obtained by scanning, and the document image is reproduced on a printing medium such as printing paper by a well-known electrophotographic process or ink-jet technique.

A copier/MFP (multifunction printer) in which an image read by a reader can be printed directly by another printer via a network has been proposed in recent years.

Fig. 21 is a diagram illustrating the configuration of a network-connected image processing system.

As shown in Fig. 21, the system includes MFPs 2101, 2104 in which an image that has been read by a self-contained reader is printed out directly by each printer, a backbone network 2102, a computer 2103, a copier 2105 having a printing function and a printer 2016.

The computer 2103 is located in an environment in which each printer or the copier is capable of printing out images via the network 2102. Further, the MFP 2101 is capable of outputting an image read by its self-contained reader to the other printers or to the copier directly via the network 2101 without the intermediary of the computer 2103. Such output is possible irrespective of whether models are of the same type, such as the MFP 2104.

In such cases it is desirable for a read image to be transmitted upon being binarized in order to reduce the load on the network 2102. Accordingly, there are many cases in which use is made of error-diffusion-type binarization, which exhibits excellent tone reproduction and resolution.

Often, however, the reproducibility of isolated dots in electrophotography or the like is dependent upon the print engine. There are instances where an image having very poor tone reproduction is output, depending

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upon the printer, owing to variations in isolated-dot reproduction from one engine to another.

Further, the reproducibility of isolated dots depends greatly upon the process conditions, and dot
5 reproducibility varies markedly owing changes in process conditions brought about by changes in the environment or change with time.

With error-diffusion-type binarization, there is a high likelihood that dots will be printed in isolated
10 form and hence the effects brought about by discrepancies in the reproducibility of isolated dots is great.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

15 Accordingly, an object of the present invention is to provide an image processing apparatus and method in which the connectivity of a binary image is controlled to deal with a change in binary-image reproducibility
20 caused by differences in the characteristics of image output devices on a network and by changes in the environment and change with time, thereby making it possible to optimize connectivity, achieve stable reproduction and improve image quality.

25 According to the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing an image processing

- apparatus having input means for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarization means for binarizing the multilevel image, which has been input by the input
- 5 means, to a binary image, the apparatus comprising: communication means for communicating with an external image output device via a network; characteristic-information storage means for receiving characteristic information of the external image output device from the
- 10 communication means and storing the characteristic information; connectivity control means for controlling connectivity of a binary image, which is binarized by the binarization means, based upon the characteristic information stored by the characteristic-information
- 15 storage means; and transmitting means for transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled by the connectivity control means, to the external image output device via the communication means.
- 20 Further, according to the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing an image processing apparatus having input means for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarization means for binarizing the
- 25 multilevel image, which has been input by the input means, to a binary image, the apparatus comprising:

communication means for communicating with an external image output device via a network; characteristic-information storage means for storing characteristic information of the external image output device;

5 connectivity control means for controlling connectivity of a binary image, which is binarized by the binarization means, based upon the characteristic information stored by the characteristic-information storage means; and transmitting means for transmitting

10 the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled by the connectivity control means, to the external image output device via the communication means.

Further, according to the present invention, the

15 foregoing object is attained by providing an image processing apparatus having input means for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarization means for binarizing the multilevel image, which has been input by the input

20 means, to a binary image, the apparatus comprising: communication means for communicating a parameter with an external image output device via a network, the parameter controlling connectivity of a binary image binarized by the binarization means; connectivity

25 control means for controlling connectivity of a binary image, which is binarized by the binarization means,

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based upon a parameter of an output destination obtained by the communication means; and transmitting means for transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled by the connectivity control means,

5 to the external image output device via the communication means.

Further, according to the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing an image processing apparatus having input means for inputting,

10 pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarization means for binarizing the multilevel image, which has been input by the input means, to a binary image, the apparatus comprising:

15 communication means for communicating with an external image output device via a network; reading means for reading a test pattern for detecting connectivity; parameter calculation means for calculating a parameter, which controls connectivity of a binary image binarized by the binarization means, in conformity with results

20 obtained from the reading means; connectivity control means for controlling connectivity of a binary image, which is binarized by the binarization means, based upon the parameter calculated by the parameter calculation means; and transmitting means for transmitting the

25 binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled by the connectivity control means, to the

external image output device via the communication means.

Other features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters designate the same or similar parts throughout the figures thereof.

10 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

Fig. 1 is a diagram showing the structure of a printing apparatus capable of copying an image in accordance with a first embodiment of the invention;

20 Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of an image processing section according to the first embodiment;

Fig. 3 is a block diagram illustrating the details of construction of a binarization circuit;

Fig. 4 is a diagram illustrating, in terms of C programming language, processing for calculating a hysteresis control quantity;

Fig. 5 is a block diagram illustrating the details
5 of construction of an error correction unit;

Fig. 6 is a diagram illustrating the details of construction of an error compression circuit and error restoration circuit;

Fig. 7 is a diagram illustrating timing at which a
10 line buffer is accessed;

Fig. 8 is a conceptual view illustrating processing for writing data to the line buffer;

Fig. 9 is a diagram useful in describing addition processing performed by the error correction unit;

Fig. 10 is a block diagram illustrating the details
15 of construction of a binarizer;

Fig. 11 is a block diagram illustrating the details of construction of a binarized-result delay unit;

Fig. 12 is a diagram showing the output state of
20 binarization results Nmn of a plurality of lines;

Fig. 13 is a block diagram illustrating the details of construction of an average-density calculation unit;

Fig. 14 is a diagram illustrating an example of coefficients when processing for calculating average
25 density is executed;

Fig. 15 is a diagram illustrating, in terms of C programming language, processing for calculating a threshold value;

Fig. 16 is a diagram illustrating an array
5 (pattern) of results of binarization;

Fig. 17 is a diagram illustrating, in terms of C programming language, an arithmetic operation performed by an adder;

Fig. 18 is a block diagram illustrating the
10 construction of a random-number generator;

Fig. 19 is a diagram illustrating, in terms of C programming language, the generation of random numbers by the random-number generator;

Fig. 20 is a diagram illustrating, in terms of C
15 programming language, control of amount of addition performed by an addition-quantity controller;

Fig. 21 is a diagram illustrating a network-connected image processing system;

Fig. 22 is a block diagram illustrating the
20 construction of an image processing section according to a second embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 23 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of an image processing section according to a third embodiment of the present invention; and

Fig. 24 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of an image processing section according to a fourth embodiment of the present invention.

5 DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Embodiments of the present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the drawings.

[First Embodiment]

10 Fig. 1 is a diagram showing the structure of a printing apparatus capable of copying an image in accordance with a first embodiment of the invention.

As shown in Fig. 1, A document reader 150 includes a document glass 152 on which a document is placed. The document is illuminated by light from an illuminating lamp 156 and light diffused by a diffuser 154, light reflected from the document is reflected by mirrors 155, 158, 159 and passes through a lens 160 so that an image is formed on a CCD 161. The latter converts the light
15 image to an electric signal to obtain an image signal.
20

The CCD 161 in this embodiment has 7200 pixels arrayed from front to back and is composed of three rows of pixels, namely R (red), green (G) and blue (B) rows.

A reading unit 153 on which the mirror 155 and lamp 156 are mounted moves to the left and right on rails (not shown), and a mirror unit 157 mounting the mirrors
25

158, 159 moves in sync with the reading unit 153. These two units are capable of reading a document in its entirety by being moved left and right.

A document cover 151 presses the document against
5 the document glass 152.

The image signal read by the document reader 150 is subjected to image processing (described in detail later) and then sent to a printer 100. The latter has a pick-up roller 102 which pulls a sheet of paper from a
10 cassette 101 containing paper as the printing medium. The sheet of paper passes through first registration rollers 103, guide plates 104 and second registration rollers 105 and is attracted to a conveyance belt 106.

Meanwhile, the image signal is divided into the
15 four colors C, M, Y, K. The C (cyan) signal is changed to a light signal by an LED array 112a and is recorded on a drum 114a as a latent image. The latent image on the drum 114a is developed by a developing unit 113a to form a toner image on the drum 114a. The developed
20 toner image is transferred to the paper on a platen 107.

The above-described process is the well-known electrophotographic process. The remaining colors M (magenta), Y (yellow) and K (black) are similarly subjected to this electrophotographic process by the LED
25 array, drum and developing units, whereby the color images are transferred to the paper.

The toner that has been transferred to the paper is fixed to the paper by a fixing unit 108. Following the completion of toner fixation, the paper is ejected into a drop tray 111 via paper ejection rollers 110.

5 Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of an image processing section according to the first embodiment

As shown in Fig. 2, the image processing section includes an input sensor 201, which comprises an
10 optoelectric transducer such as a CCD and a driving device for driving the transducer, for reading and scanning a document. An input correction circuit 202 sequentially inputs image data representing the document read by the input sensor 201, quantizes each pixel of
15 the image data to digital data and executes digital processing to perform a shading correction or the like for correcting sensitivity unevenness of the CCD sensor and illumination unevenness caused by the illuminating light source.

20 A digital filter circuit 203 subjects the input image data to edge emphasis and smoothing. A LOG conversion circuit 204 converts RGB image data to CMY data by a look-up table, not shown. A color conversion processing circuit 205 uses a multidimensional mapping
25 table (not shown) to execute color conversion processing that corresponds to the colorization characteristic of

the printing toner (or ink).

A gamma conversion circuit 206 uses a one-dimensional look-up table (not shown) to apply a correction so as to linearize tone in dependence upon the printing tone characteristic of the printer. A binarization circuit 207 quantizes multilevel image data to binary data. A selector 208 selects whether to print out the binarized image data or to transmit it to a network. A printhead 209 is controlled to turn dots on or off, thereby to reproduce the image, based upon binary data sent from the binarization circuit 207 by the selector 208.

A CPU 210 identifies a printer with which this system is communicating via the network and selects or calculates connectivity parameters that are optimum for this printer. The CPU 210 controls the overall apparatus in accordance with a program and control data stored in a ROM, not shown. A RAM 211 backs up the connectivity parameters.

A network interface 212 serving as network communication means communicates with another printer and sends print data via a network. A correlation table 213 stores the correlation between the print characteristics of each of the printers and connectivity parameters.

In a case where a connectivity parameter is set in

the arrangement described above, first the network interface 212 communicates with the printer where printing is to be performed. Information representing the engine of this printer is sent to the CPU 210. The
5 engine information is information indicating whether the printer at the communication destination has a print engine which operates in accordance with the ink-jet technique, an electrophotographic technique using LEDs or an electrophotographic technique using a laser.

10 A connectivity parameter that is optimum for the printer is calculated by the CPU 210 from the engine information that has been sent. The relationship between engine information and connectivity parameter is found in advance by experimentation, and the correlation
15 is put into table form and stored in the correlation table 213. For example, since an electrophotographic printer using an LED or laser has an isolated-dot reproducibility inferior to that of an ink-jet printer, the parameter is set so as to strengthen connectivity in
20 areas where density is low.

The connectivity parameter is calculated from the relations in the correlation table 213. In a case where there are several connectivity parameters, these may be divided into groups. Further, the parameters may be
25 calculated by a circuit using membership functions or the like. A calculated connectivity parameter is stored

in the RAM 211. When printing is actually performed, the binarization circuit 207 binarizes the image signal using the parameter in the back-up RAM 211.

The details of the binarization circuit 207 will
5 now be described.

Fig. 3 is a block diagram illustrating the details of construction of the binarization circuit 207. The overall flow of signals will be explained before describing the blocks of the binarization circuit and
10 the connectivity parameter in detail.

The binarization circuit 207 includes an error correction unit 302 the inputs to which are error data E, which has been generated by a binarizer 301, and a signal DR' obtained by adding a random number (described
15 later) to an input multilevel signal D from the gamma conversion circuit 206 and dividing the sum by a constant 17.

The error correction unit 302 subjects the entered error data E to an error correction in n-pixel units and
20 outputs the result to the binarizer 301 as an image signal DE.

The inputs to the binarizer 301 are the image signal DE, a binarization slice value S, described later, and a calculated value m of average density,
25 described later. The binarizer 301 compares the image signal DE and the binarization slice value S to obtain a

binary output N. The binarizer 301 then subtracts the calculated value m of average density from the image signal DE to calculate binarization error data E.

A binarized-result delay unit 303 receives the
5 binary output N as an input, applies a delay of a prescribed number of lines and sends the resulting data to an average-density calculation unit 304 and threshold-value calculation unit 305 as binarization results N_{mn} and $B*ij$ of a plurality of lines.

10 The average-density calculation unit 304 receives the binarization results N_{mn} of a plurality of lines as an input, applies a multiply-and-accumulate operation to coefficients that have been set in advance and to the delayed binarized result and outputs the calculated
15 value m of average density to an adder 306 and binarizer 301.

The output $B*ij$ from the binarized-result delay unit 303, the input multilevel data D and an output T from a hysteresis control quantity calculation unit 308
20 are input to the threshold-value calculation unit 305. The latter calculates a threshold-value control quantity for any density area in conformity with the $B*ij$ signal, which indicates a past binarization condition (pattern), and sends the calculated value to the adder 306 as a
25 binarization slice value S' .

The signals from the average-density calculation

unit 304 and threshold-value calculation unit 305 are
input to the adder 306, which adds these signals and
outputs the sum to the binarizer 301 as the binarization
slice value S. An adder 307 adds the input image signal
5 D and a signal P1 from an addition-quantity controller
313, described later, and outputs the sum DR.

Using the signal DR from the adder 307, the
hysteresis control quantity calculation unit 308
according to this invention calculates a hysteresis
10 control quantity based upon a technique described later
and outputs the control quantity to the threshold-value
calculation unit 305. The hysteresis control quantity
is controlled by referring to values in the back-up RAM
211 which stores the connectivity parameters.

15 A divider 309 divides the input signal DR by the
constant 17 and outputs only the product DR'. Any
remainder is discarded in its entirety. A random-number
generator 310 generates an m-series random number R of
-17 to 7 through a technique described later and outputs
20 the random number R to a selector 312 and to a sign-
reversal and data storage unit 311.

The sign-reversal and data storage unit 311
reverses the sign of the random number R, retains the
data for only a fixed number of pixels, described later,
25 and then outputs the retained random number to the
selector 312. The latter produces an output by

switching between the signal from the random-number generator 310 and the signal from the sign-reversal and data storage unit 311 in response to a pixel position signal having a timing described later.

5 In accordance with the value of the image signal D, the addition-quantity controller 313 controls the amplitude of the random-number output value using a technique described later.

 Binarization processing is executed by the
10 binarization circuit 207 constructed as set forth above.

 The details of each component shown in Fig. 3 will now be described.

 First the hysteresis control quantity calculation unit 308 of this invention will be described with
15 reference to Fig. 4.

 The hysteresis control quantity calculation unit 308 varies the value of a constant ALF (= 32) in accordance with the input signal DR and outputs the hysteresis control signal T. The arrangement is such
20 that a change in the hysteresis control signal T causes a change in binarization connectivity.

 The constant ALF is the above-mentioned connectivity parameter and is implemented by a register retained in the back-up RAM 211. Similarly, ALFm is a
25 register held in the back-up RAM 211. If the value of constant ALF is enlarged, dot connectivity in

binarization processing increases. Conversely, if the value of ALF is made to approach zero, control to reduce connectivity is carried out. It is also possible to adjust the hysteresis quantity in any density area by

5 constants LR1, LR2, LR3, LR4 set by the CPU 210.

Fig. 4 illustrates, in terms of C programming language, processing for calculating the hysteresis control quantity. In a case where the entered signal DR is equal to or less than the constant LR1 (= 16),

10 processing for setting ll to "0" is executed. In a case where the entered signal DR is greater than LR1 and equal to or less than the constant LR2 (= 48), ll is found in accordance with the following equation:

$$ll = \{(DR - LR1) * [ALF * 256 / (LR2 - LR1)]\} / 256$$

15 According to this calculation, the value of ll gradually approaches the constant ALF (= 32) from "0" as the value of the input signal DR increases from the constant LR1 to the constant LR2.

In a case where the input signal DR is greater than

20 LR2 and equal to or less than the constant LR3 (= 233), ll is output as the fixed constant ALF. If the input signal DR is greater than the constant LR3 and equal to or less than the constant LR4 (= 255), then ll is found in accordance with the following equation:

25
$$ll = ALF - \{(DR - LR3) * [ALF * 256 / (LR4 - LR3)]\} / 256$$

This indicates that the value of ll gradually

approaches "0" from the constant ALF (= 32) from "0" as the value of the input signal DR increases from the constant LR3 to the constant LR4.

In a case where the input signal DR is greater than
5 LR4, processing for setting l1 to "0" is executed.

After the above-described processing is executed, the result of subtracting the constant ALFm (= 16) from l1 is delivered as the output signal T. The purpose of this subtraction operation is to change the signal T of
10 the hysteresis control quantity calculation unit 308 from a negative to a positive value. This makes possible texture control in any density area over a range of broad latitude.

The error correction unit 302 will be described
15 next. The error correction unit 302 adds the binarization error data E to the image signal DR' to calculate the image signal DE that has undergone the error correction, then outputs the signal DE to the binarizer 301. The error correction unit 302 has the
20 construction shown in Fig. 5.

The entered binarization error data E is limited to -6 to +6 by limiter processing (not shown) so as not to be influenced by past binarization results, which is referred to as a dot blanking phenomenon as described in
25 U.S. Patent No. 5,325,448, in a case where the input multilevel data D changes suddenly from high to low

(data) of up to four bits (± 7).

Storing quantization-error values in two-pixel units is advantageous in that it broadens the latitude of the timing at which the memory is accessed and makes it possible to reduce memory capacity.

The quantization-error value of the preceding line is read out of the line buffer 503 at the timing RDclk shown in Fig. 7 and is input to the error-restoration circuit 507.

The error compression circuit 506 sums the quantization-error value in two-pixel units and stores the result in the line buffer 503. When the result is read out of the line buffer 503, therefore, the error-restoration circuit 507 halves the result using the divider circuit 603, as shown in Fig. 6. The quantization-error value read out of the line buffer 503 used in correcting the error of each pixel is the same as that in terms of two-pixel units. However, the necessary capacity of the line buffer 503 can be reduced with almost no decline in image quality resulting from this arrangement.

With reference again to Fig. 5, the adder circuit 504 calculates the sum of the output EA from the error-restoration circuit 507 and the output EM from the subtraction circuit 502 and outputs the sum to an adder circuit 505. The latter calculates the sum of EA and EB

delayed by one line and the image signal DR' and delivers the sum as image signal DE.

As shown in Fig. 9, the error correction unit 302 adds the value of binarization error EA obtained when "A" on the overlying line is binarized and the value of binarization error EB when "B" of the preceding pixel is binarized to the data of a pixel of interest indicated by "*", as illustrated in Fig. 9.

Next, the binarizer 301, which receives the image signal DE, the binarization slice value S (described later) and the calculated value m of average density (described later) as inputs and compares these to deliver the binary output N and the binarization error data E. The binarizer 301 is illustrated in Fig. 10.

The input image signal DE enters a comparator circuit 1001 and a subtractor circuit 1002. The comparator circuit 1001 compares the value of the image signal DE and the value of the binarization slice value S and delivers the binary output N in the following manner:

$N = 1$ when $DE > S$ holds; and

$N = 0$ when $DE \leq S$ holds.

The subtractor circuit 1002 subtracts the calculated value m of average density from the value of image signal DE and outputs the difference

$E = DE - m$

as the binarization error data E.

At this time limiter processing (not illustrates) is executed in such a manner that the value of E will fall within the range $-6 \sim +6$, as mentioned above.

5 The binarized-result delay unit 303, which receives the binary output N from the binarizer 301 as an input, applies a delay of a predetermined number of lines and sends data to the average-density calculation unit 304 and threshold-value calculation unit 305 as the
10 binarization results N_{mn} , B_{ij} of a plurality of lines. The construction of the binarized-result delay unit 303 is illustrated in Fig. 11.

 The applied binary output N is sent from a one-bit, one-line line buffer 1101 to a line buffer 1102 so that
15 the data is delayed line by line. At the same time, the binary output N is successively delayed one pixel by delay elements 1103 to 1108 each comprising a one-pixel delay circuit. The output of delay element 1106 and the output of delay element 1107 are delivered as outputs
20 N14 and N15, respectively.

 The binarized data delayed one line by the line buffer 1101 is delayed by delay elements 1109 to 1114 and the outputs of delay elements 1109 to 1113 are delivered as outputs N21 to N25, respectively. The
25 binarized data delayed one line by the line buffer 1102 is delayed by delay elements 1115 to 1120 and the

outputs of delay elements 1115 to 1119 are delivered as outputs N31 to N35, respectively.

At the same time, the outputs of delay elements 1106 to 1108 are delivered as outputs B10, B20, B30, 5 respectively. The binarized data delayed one line by the line buffer 1101 is delivered as outputs B32 to B02 and Bi12 to Bi32 after being delayed. The binarized data delayed one line by the line buffer 1102 is delivered as outputs B31 to B01 and Bi11 to Bi31 after 10 being delayed.

In other words, data obtained by binarizing a two-dimensional image is delayed a plurality of lines and a plurality of pixels and is input to the average-density calculation unit 304 as the binarization results Nmn of 15 a plurality of lines in the manner shown in Fig. 12.

The binarization results Nmn of a plurality of lines are input to the average-density calculation unit 304, which performs a multiply-and-accumulate operation based upon coefficients that have been set in advance 20 and the delayed results of binarization and outputs the data m used by the binarizer 301 and adder 306. The construction of the average-density calculation unit 304 is shown in Fig. 13.

A multiplier circuit 1301 receives the binarized 25 data N15 and a coefficient M15 as inputs, multiplies these and outputs the product. A multiplier circuit

1302 receives the binarized data N14 and a coefficient M14 as inputs, multiplies these and outputs the product. The above operation is performed in similar fashion by multiplier circuits 1303 to 1312. The products obtained
5 by these multiplication operations are summed by an adder circuit 1313. The sum is output as the calculated value m of average density. Fig. 14 is a diagram illustrating an example of coefficients when processing for calculating average density is executed.

10 The threshold-value calculation unit 305 will be described next. Fig. 15 is a diagram illustrating, in terms of C programming language, processing for calculating a threshold value.

First the threshold-value calculation unit 305
15 divides the value of the applied signal T from the hysteresis control quantity calculation unit 308 by each of constants LT1 (= 2) and LT2 (= 4) to obtain variables A (= $T/LT1$), B (= $T/LT2$) used internally.

Next, through a method described below, the
20 threshold-value calculation unit 305 controls the value of the binarization slice value S' by the variables A, B and constants in dependence upon the array (pattern) of results of binarizing the output B'*ij from the binarized-result delay unit 303.

25 Fig. 16 is a diagram illustrating an array (pattern) of results of binarization.

In this example, reference is not made to the pixel immediately preceding the pixel of interest in order to achieve high-speed processing. Of course, if sufficiently fast logic is incorporated, the pixel

5 immediately preceding the pixel of interest may be referred to without problems.

Described next will be processing for actually controlling the binarization slice value S in dependence upon the array (pattern) of results of binarization.

10 In a case where binarization conditions surrounding a pixel of interest are as set forth below, the binarization slice value S is output upon being set forcibly to the maximum constant 15. The purpose is to make it difficult to print a dot.

15 $B32==0\&\&B22==1\&\&B12==0\&\&B21==0\&\&B11==1\&\&B01==0$ or
 $Bi12==0\&\&Bi22==1\&\&Bi32==0\&\&B01==0\&\&Bi11==1\&\&Bi21==0$

In a case where binarization conditions surrounding a pixel of interest are as set forth below and, moreover, input multilevel data D is less than 31 (31 in

20 0 to 255), the binarization slice value S is output upon being set forcibly to the maximum constant 15. The purpose is to make it difficult to print a dot when the above-mentioned conditions hold.

$B12==0\&\&B02==0\&\&Bi12==0\&\&Bi22==0\&\&Bi32==0\&\&$
 25 $B11==0\&\&B01==0\&\&Bi11==1\&\&Bi21==0\&\&Bi31==0\&\&B20==0$
 On the other hand, in a case where the input

multilevel data D is equal to or greater than 31 (31 in 0 to 255) under the above-described conditions, the binarization slice value S is output upon being set to an average-density value of zero. This is to assure

5 that texture control will not be carried out in a case where the past results of binarization have a specific array (pattern). Of course, the constant 31 need not be a decided value and can be a parameter that is set another value such as 48 or 64.

10 If the value is made larger than 31, texture control tends to be applied more easily. Conversely, if the value is made smaller than 31, it goes without saying that texture control becomes less likely to be applied.

15 In a case where binarization conditions surrounding a pixel of interest are as set forth below, the binarization slice value S is output upon being set to -A.

B02==0&&B12==0&&B11==0&&B01==1&&B11==1&&B121==0&&
 20 B20==0

Here the purpose is to make it easier to print a dot when the above-described conditions hold. Processing is executed without referring to results of binarizing the pixel immediately preceding the pixel of

25 interest.

Similarly, the binarization slice value S' is

controlled using the internal variables A, B and constants, without referring to the results concerning the pixel immediately preceding the pixel of interest, in dependence upon each pattern of binarized results.

- 5 As a result, control is performed to make it easier to print a dot in a case where the calculated value T of amount of hysteresis control is positive and to make it more difficult to print a dot in a case where the calculated value T of amount of hysteresis control is
10 negative.

- If the above-described processing is applied successively to each pixel, dot connectivity can be controlled with any amount of dot connectivity and in any density area in conformity with the calculated value
15 T of amount of hysteresis control.

- The binarization slice value S' thus obtained is input together with the output m of the average-density calculation unit 304 to the adder 306, which proceeds to add these two signals. When the signal S' is 15, the
20 binarization slice value S is output as 15. At all other times the calculation $S = S' + m$ is performed and the result is output. Fig. 17 is a diagram illustrating this calculation written in C programming language.

- Next, the adder 307 adds the random-number P1
25 (described later), the input multilevel signal D and the constant 8. Since the constant used in division

performed by the divider 309 (described later) is 17, the remainder after division will be the maximum 16. It is therefore necessary to make the amplitude of the random number an even number of 16 or greater. Hence
5 the constant 8 is found from the operation $16/2$. This added as a bias component.

Though not illustrated, a limiter is applied so that the sum will fall within the range of 0 to 255. The signal from the adder 307 is input to the divider
10 309 and hysteresis control quantity calculation unit 308.

As mentioned earlier, the divider 309 divides by the constant 17. The output value at this time is only the quotient obtained by division; the remainder is
15 discarded in its entirety. The output signal DR' from the divider 309 is input to the error correction unit 302, which proceeds to execute error correction processing.

The random-number generator 310, which is a
20 processor for generating the random number R, will now be described. Fig. 18 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of a random-number generator 310 and Fig. 19 illustrates random-number generation written in C programming language.

25 First, initialization is carried out to write "0" to a register p[ii]: ($0 \leq ii \leq 25$) and to set only a

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register P[12] to "1". Before a random number is output, the operation $p[0] = ((p[25] \wedge p[24] \wedge p[23] \wedge p[22]) \& 1)$ is performed. Random-number vales -17 to 17 are then generated in accordance with the following operation:

5 random number = $(1 - 2 * p[22]) * (((p[15] * 64 + p[16] * 32 + p[17] * 16 + p[18] * 8 + p[19] * 4 + p[20] * 2 + p[21]) * 17) / 128)$

What is important here is that it is necessary to make the maximum value (17 in this embodiment) of the generated random number one-half or more (fractions being discarded) of the divisor (17 in this embodiment) used in the divider 309.

10

According to this embodiment, the division used in the divider 309 is 17 and, hence we have $17/2 = 8$ (discarding fractions) and it is necessary that the maximum random number generated by the random-number generator 310 be set to a value of 8 or higher (the value is set to 17 in this embodiment).

15

The random-number generation described above is applied to all pixels.

20 The sign-reversal and data storage unit 311 reverses only the sign of the random-number value from the random-number generator 310 generated at pixel positions "p × X" ($p \geq 2$, where p is an even number, and X is an address value in the main-scan direction), holds the result for "p/2" pixels and then outputs the result.

25

For example, if the value of p is "2", random-number values generated at pixel positions " $p \times X$ ", namely at pixel positions "0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, ...", are held temporarily and the signs of random-number values that were held at pixel positions "1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, ..." are reversed, after which the values are output.

In this embodiment, refresh is performed one pixel at a time.

10 The selector 312 switches between delivering the random-number value from the random-number generator 310 generated pixel by pixel and the random-number value from the sign-reversal and data storage unit 311 in accordance with the pixel-position signal.

15 The pixel-position signal selects the random-number value from the sign-reversal and data storage unit 311 only when the pixel position is " $p \times X + p/2$ " ($p \geq 2$, where p is an even number, and X is an address value in the main-scan direction). At all other times the pixel-position signal selects the random-number value from the random-number generator 310.

In a case where the maximum random-number value in the random-number generator 310 is greater than one-half (8 after decimals are discarded) of the divisor (17 in this embodiment) used in the divider 309, the addition-

25

quantity controller 313 applies output control conforming to the input multilevel data D only with respect to this large (superfluous) random number.

Fig. 20 is a diagram illustrating control of amount of addition performed by the addition-quantity controller 313 in C programming language.

A constant SL is decided in such a manner that the maximum value of the output RD from the selector 312 will be one-half the divisor of the divider 309. More specifically, in this embodiment, the maximum value of RD is 17 and the divisor used in the divider 309 also is 17. Accordingly, we have (maximum value of RD)/2 = 17/2 = 8 (discarding fractions), and the value of SL is set to 8.

In a case where the input multilevel signal D is equal to or less than N1 (e.g., 16), the minimum necessary random number is added in accordance with the calculation " $P1 = RD/SL$ ".

The minimum necessary random number referred to here means that the deviation in the random number is made "-8 to 8" because the divisor in the divider 309 is "17".

In other words, letting α (= 16) represent the deviation in the random number, the divisor used in the divider 309 satisfies the relation $|\alpha+1|$ (= 17).

In a case where the input multilevel data D is greater than N1 and equal to or less than N2 (e.g., 32), the random number that is added will have had its amplitude controlled in accordance with the following

5 calculation:

$$p1 = (RD - RD/SL) * (D - N1) / (N2 - N1) + RD/SL$$

Similarly, if the input multilevel data D is equal to or greater than N3 (e.g., 201) and less than N4 (e.g., 233), the random number that is added will have

10 had its amplitude controlled in accordance with the following calculation through processing similar to that described above:

$$p1 = (RD - RD/SL) * (N4 - D) / (N4 - N3) + RD/SL$$

If the input multilevel data D is equal to or
15 greater than N4, then only the minimum necessary random number is added in accordance with the calculation

$$p1 = RD/SL$$

Furthermore, if the input multilevel data D is outside the above-mentioned range, all random numbers RD
20 are output from the addition-quantity controller 313 as the random number P1.

By virtue of the arrangement described above, binarization processing is executed by the binarization circuit 207 and the binarized data is printed out by the
25 printhead 209 via the selector 208.

In accordance with the embodiment set forth above,

dot-connectivity parameters of a binarization circuit can be changed and the connectivity parameters are corrected to optimum values for dealing with variations in dot reproducibility ascribable to differences in engine characteristics from one printer to another. This makes it possible to achieve stable reproduction of dots even in the case of printers connected via network. The end result is improved printing quality.

[Second Embodiment]

10 A second embodiment of the present invention will now be described with reference to the drawings.

Fig. 22 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of an image processing section according to a second embodiment of the present invention. As shown in Fig. 22, this embodiment differs from the first embodiment of Fig. 2 in that the correlation table 213 of the first embodiment is replaced by a floppy-disk drive 214 and hard disk 215. According to this arrangement, characteristic information concerning each printer can be obtained from a medium such as a floppy disk rather than being stored in advance as in the first embodiment.

With this arrangement, information similar to a PPD file that notifies this apparatus of the characteristics of each printer is provided via a medium such as a floppy disk. The floppy-disk drive 214 reads this

information and stored in on the hard disk 215 via the
CU 210.

In accordance with the second embodiment, data that
has been stored on the hard disk 215 performs a function
5 the same as that of the correlation table.

[Third Embodiment]

A third embodiment of the present invention will
now be described with reference to the drawings.

The third embodiment uses a reader to read a change
10 in dot reproducibility caused by a change in environment
or a change with time of each printer on a network over
which binary data is exchanged, and corrects dot-
connectivity parameters in binarization in order to deal
with dot connectivity that has changed, thereby
15 optimizing dot connectivity to make possible stable
reproduction of dots and provide a network printer
environment in which high-quality printing is obtained
at low cost.

Examples of a change in environment are a change in
20 temperature and humidity brought about a change of
location at which the device is installed. An example
of a change with time is a change in the film thickness
of a drum that accompanies an increase in number of
copies printed.

25 Fig. 23 is a block diagram illustrating the
construction of an image processing section according to

the third embodiment of the present invention.
Components in Fig. 23 having functions identical with
those of the first embodiment in Fig. 2 are designated
by like reference characters and need not be described
5 again.

The arrangement of Fig. 23 includes a selector 220
for selecting an image memory (described later) as an
output destination of image data in a case where a
change in dot connectivity due to a change in the
10 environment of a printer or a change with time is read;
a selector 221 for selecting whether to print binarized
image data as is or send the data to a network, and for
selecting whether the destination of an input is the
binarization circuit 207 or a pattern generator 222; the
15 pattern generator 222 for generating a test pattern
composed of several tone patches in which the
connectivity parameters have been changed; an image
memory 223 for storing read image data from the selector
220; and a correction-value calculation circuit 224 for
20 calculating optimum connectivity parameters from the
image data that has been stored in the image memory 223.

This arrangement will be described in regard to a
case where connectivity parameters of the printing
apparatus itself are calculated when connectivity
25 parameters are set.

First, the pattern generator 222 generates a test-

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pattern signal. This signal is input as an image signal by the selector 221 and enters the printhead 209, which proceeds to perform printing based upon this binary pattern data. When printing of the test-pattern signal
5 ends, the paper ejected from the printer is placed upon the document glass 152 and is read in. Data that has entered from the input sensor 201 passes through the input correction circuit 202 and filter 203 (unnecessary processing such as filtering is not applied) and is
10 stored in the image memory 223 by the selector 220. Connectivity is calculated by the correction-value calculation circuit 224 from the stored image data. Here tone patches are cut from the image data and it is determined which of several patches have a density level
15 equivalent to highlight density. Connectivity parameters are calculated from the densities of these patches.

Correction when a connection is made through a network will be described next.

20 First, the network interface 212 establishes communication with a printer at the printing destination. This printer uses its CPU to extract connectivity parameters from the connectivity-parameter back-up RAM and sends this information to this side (the
25 sending side) via network communication means. The CPU 210 stores the sent connectivity parameters in the back-

up RAM 211 for connectivity parameters. The printer at the destination rewrites the connectivity parameters in its back-up RAM periodically in order to deal with a change in the environment of the printer and a change
5 with time. As mentioned earlier, rewriting of the connectivity parameters is carried out by reading a test pattern.

Next, the binarization circuit 207 binarizes the image signal based upon the connectivity parameters sent
10 from the destination printer and stored in the back-up RAM 211. The binarized image signal is sent from the selector 221 to the printer at the destination (the receiving side) via the network interface 212. The printer at the destination performs printing based upon
15 this binary image data.

Thus, there is provided means which, through use of a function that corrects (calibrates) a change in connectivity parameters due to a change in environment or a change with time on a per-device basis, is capable
20 of transmitting connectivity parameters that have been corrected. This makes it possible to generate and send binary image data that assures stable dot reproduction by the destination printer even in a network environment in which only binary image data can be communicated.

25 [Fourth Embodiment]

A fourth embodiment of the present invention will

now be described with reference to the drawings.

The fourth embodiment adds a memory 225, in which a number of connectivity parameters are stored in advance, to the arrangement of the third embodiment illustrated in Fig. 23.

Fig. 24 is a block diagram illustrating the construction of an image processing section according to the fourth embodiment. As shown in Fig. 24, all connectivity parameters of a number of printers connected to a network can be stored beforehand in the memory 225 instead of receiving connectivity parameters from another party when an output is to be produced.

The fourth embodiment is capable of dealing with a case where an output is made to a printer that does not have a reader or that cannot calculate connectivity parameters on its own. In such cases it is necessary to correct connectivity parameters through the network.

The pattern generator 222 generates a test-pattern signal. This signal is input as an image signal by the selector 221 and enters the network interface 212. The latter sends this binary pattern data to the printer on at the destination (on the receiving side), which proceeds to print out the pattern data. The sheet of paper on which the pattern data has been printed is read by the reader of the printing apparatus on this side (the sending side). That is, the paper ejected from the

printer at the destination is placed on the document glass 152 of the printing apparatus on this side and is read in.

Next, image data that has entered from the input sensor 201 passes through the input correction circuit 202 and filter 203 (unnecessary processing such as filtering is not applied) and is stored in the image memory 223 by the selector 220. Connectivity is calculated by the correction-value calculation circuit 224 from the stored image data. The calculated connectivity parameters are stored in the memory 225. Connectivity parameters of a variety of printers are thus stored in the memory 225. When data is actually output to the destination printer via the network, the connectivity parameters of the applicable printer that have been stored in memory 225 are stored in the back-up RAM 211, the binarization circuit 207 performs binarization based upon these connectivity parameters and sends the binarized image data to the printer at the destination via the network interface 212.

By adopting this arrangement, stable dot reproduction can be assured even at a printer that cannot calculate connectivity parameters itself or that does not possess a reader.

Thus, in accordance with the third and fourth embodiments, dot-connectivity parameters of a

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binarization circuit can be changed, a change in dot reproducibility caused by a change in environment or a change with time is read by a reader, the connectivity parameters are optimized for dealing with this change in

5 dot reproducibility and a correction is carried out for each printer. This makes possible the stable reproduction of dots, even in a case where printing is performed over a network, at printers having different dot reproducibilities caused by a change in process

10 conditions due to environmental change or by disparities in engine characteristics. Printing quality can be improved as a result.

According to the third and fourth embodiments, changes in the environment and change with time are

15 dealt with by printing a test-pattern signal, reading the printout and changing the connectivity parameters. However, sensors for sensing temperature and humidity or a sensor for sensing drum film thickness may be provided and the connectivity parameters can be changed in

20 conformity with outputs from these sensors.

The present invention can be applied to a system constituted by a plurality of devices (e.g., a host computer, interface, reader, printer, etc.) or to an apparatus comprising a single device (e.g., a copier or

25 facsimile machine, etc.).

Furthermore, it goes without saying that the object

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of the invention is attained also by supplying a storage medium storing the program codes of the software for performing the functions of the foregoing embodiments to a system or an apparatus, reading the program codes with
5 a computer (e.g., a CPU or MPU) of the system or apparatus from the storage medium, and then executing the program codes.

In this case, the program codes read from the storage medium implement the novel functions of the
10 embodiments and the storage medium storing the program codes constitutes the invention.

Examples of storage media that can be used for supplying the program code are a floppy disk, hard disk, optical disk, magneto-optical disk, CD-ROM, CD-R,
15 magnetic tape, non-volatile type memory card or ROM, etc.

Furthermore, besides the case where the aforesaid functions according to the embodiments are implemented by executing the program codes read by a computer, it
20 goes without saying that the present invention covers a case where an operating system or the like running on the computer performs a part of or the entire process in accordance with the designation of program codes and implements the functions according to the embodiment.

25 It goes without saying that the present invention further covers a case where, after the program codes

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read from the storage medium are written in a function expansion board inserted into the computer or in a memory provided in a function expansion unit connected to the computer, a CPU or the like contained in the

5 function expansion board or function expansion unit performs a part of or the entire process in accordance with the designation of program codes and implements the function of the above embodiment.

Thus, in accordance with the present invention, as

10 described above, the connectivity of a binary image is controlled to deal with a change in binary-image reproducibility caused by differences in the characteristics of image output devices on a network and by changes in the environment and change with time,

15 thereby making it possible to optimize connectivity, achieve stable reproduction and improve image quality.

As many apparently widely different embodiments of the present invention can be made without departing from the spirit and scope thereof, it is to be understood

20 that the invention is not limited to the specific embodiments thereof except as defined in the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An image processing apparatus having input means for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarization means for
- 5 binarizing the multilevel image, which has been input by the input means, to a binary image, said apparatus comprising:
- communication means for communicating with an external image output device via a network;
- 10 characteristic-information storage means for receiving characteristic information of the external image output device from said communication means and storing the characteristic information;
- connectivity control means for controlling
- 15 connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized by the binarization means, based upon the characteristic information stored by said characteristic-information storage means; and
- transmitting means for transmitting the binary
- 20 image, the connectivity of which has been controlled by said connectivity control means, to the external image output device via said communication means.
2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said characteristic-information storage means stores
- 25 correlation between a parameter which decides connectivity of a binary image binarized by said

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binarization means and engine characteristic information representing engine characteristics of the image output device.

3. An image processing apparatus having input means for
5 inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarization means for binarizing the multilevel image, which has been input by the input means, to a binary image, said apparatus comprising:
- 10 communication means for communicating with an external image output device via a network;
characteristic-information storage means for storing characteristic information of the external image output device;
- 15 connectivity control means for controlling connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized by the binarization means, based upon the characteristic information stored by said characteristic-information storage means; and
- 20 transmitting means for transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled by said connectivity control means, to the external image output device via said communication means.
4. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said
25 characteristic-information storage means reads and stores characteristic information from a storage medium

which stores characteristics of the external image output device.

5 5. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein the characteristic information is information indicating the type of engine possessed by the image output device.

6. An image processing apparatus having input means for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarization means for binarizing the multilevel image, which has been input by
10 the input means, to a binary image, said apparatus comprising:

communication means for communicating a parameter with an external image output device via a network, said parameter controlling connectivity of a binary image
15 binarized by the binarization means;

connectivity control means for controlling connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized by the binarization means, based upon a parameter of an output destination obtained by said communication means;
20 and

transmitting means for transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled by said connectivity control means, to the external image output device via said communication means.
25 7. An image processing apparatus having input means for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing

gray-scale information, and binarization means for binarizing the multilevel image, which has been input by the input means, to a binary image, said apparatus comprising:

5 communication means for communicating with an external image output device via a network;

reading means for reading a test pattern for calculating a connectivity parameter;

parameter calculation means for calculating a
10 parameter, which controls connectivity of the binary image binarized by said binarization means, in conformity with results obtained from said reading means;

connectivity control means for controlling
15 connectivity of a binary image, which is binarized by said binarization means, based upon the parameter calculated by said parameter calculation means; and

transmitting means for transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled by
20 the connectivity control means, to the external image output device via said communication means.

8. The apparatus according to claim 7, wherein the test pattern for detecting connectivity is a test pattern that has been output by the external image output
25 device.

9. An image processing method for inputting, pixel by

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pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarizing the multilevel image to a binary image, comprising:

- a communication step of communicating with an external image output device via a network;
- a characteristic-information storage step of receiving characteristic information of the external image output device at said communication step and storing the characteristic information;
- a connectivity control step of controlling connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized, based upon the characteristic information stored at said characteristic-information storage step; and

a transmitting step of transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled at said connectivity control step, to the external image output device.

10. An image processing method for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarizing the multilevel image to a binary image, comprising:

- a communication step of communicating with an external image output device via a network;
- a characteristic-information storage step of storing characteristic information of the external image output device;

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a connectivity control step of controlling connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized, based upon the characteristic information stored at said characteristic-information storage step; and

5 a transmitting step of transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled at said connectivity control step, to the external image output device.

11. An image processing method for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarizing the multilevel image to a binary image, comprising:

10

a communication step of communicating a parameter with an external image output device via a network, said parameter controlling connectivity of the binary image that is binarized;

15

a connectivity control step of controlling connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized, based upon a parameter of an output destination obtained at said communication step; and

20

a transmitting step of transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled at said connectivity control step, to the external image output device.

12. An image processing method for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale

25

information, and binarizing the multilevel image to a binary image, comprising:

a communication step of communicating with an external image output device via a network;

5 a reading step of reading a test pattern for calculating a connectivity parameter;

a parameter calculation step of calculating a parameter, which controls connectivity of the binary image binarized, in conformity with results obtained at
10 said reading step;

a connectivity control step of controlling connectivity of a binary image, which is binarized, based upon the parameter calculated at said parameter calculation step; and

15 a transmitting step of transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled at the connectivity control step, to the external image output device.

13. The method according to claim 12, wherein the test
20 pattern for detecting connectivity is a test pattern that has been output by the external image output device.

14. A computer-readable storage medium storing program code of an image processing method for inputting, pixel
25 by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarizing the multilevel image to a

binary image, comprising:

code of a communication step of communicating with
an external image output device via a network;

code of a characteristic-information storage step
5 of storing received characteristic information of the
external image output device;

code of a connectivity control step of controlling
connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized,
based upon the characteristic information stored; and

10 code of a transmitting step of transmitting the
binary image, the connectivity of which has been
controlled, to the external image output device.

15 15. A computer-readable storage medium storing program
code of an image processing method for inputting, pixel
by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale
information, and binarizing the multilevel image to a
binary image, comprising:

code of a communication step of communicating with
an external image output device via a network;

20 code of a characteristic-information storage step
of storing characteristic information of the external
image output device;

code of a connectivity control step of controlling
connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized,

25 based upon the characteristic information stored; and
code of a transmitting step of transmitting the

binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled, to the external image output device.

16. A computer-readable storage medium storing program code of an image processing method for inputting, pixel

5 by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarizing the multilevel image to a binary image, comprising:

code of a communication step of communicating a parameter with an external image output device via a
10 network, said parameter controlling connectivity of the binary image that is binarized;

code of a connectivity control step of controlling connectivity of the binary image, which is binarized, based upon an obtained parameter of an output
15 destination; and

code of a transmitting step of transmitting the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled, to the external image output device.

17. A computer-readable storage medium storing program
20 code of an image processing method for inputting, pixel by pixel, a multilevel image containing gray-scale information, and binarizing the multilevel image to a binary image, comprising:

code of a communication step of communicating with
25 an external image output device via a network;

code of a reading step of reading a test pattern

for calculating a connectivity parameter;

code of a parameter calculation step of calculating
a parameter, which controls connectivity of the binary
image binarized, in conformity with results obtained by

5 reading;

code of a connectivity control step of controlling
connectivity of a binary image, which is binarized,
based upon the parameter calculated; and

code of a transmitting step of transmitting the
10 binary image, the connectivity of which has been
controlled, to the external image output device.

18. The storage medium according to claim 17, wherein
the test pattern for detecting connectivity is a test
pattern that has been output by the external image

15 output device.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

Communication with an external image output device is established via a network interface, information concerning the characteristics of the image output devices is received and is held in a back-up RAM. A multilevel image containing gray-scale information enters from an input sensor pixel by pixel and is binarized to a binary image by a binarization circuit. At this time the connectivity of the binary image is controlled based upon the characteristic information held in the RAM and the binary image, the connectivity of which has been controlled, is transmitted to the external image output device via the network interface. As a result, the connectivity of the binary image is controlled to deal with a change in binary-image reproducibility caused by differences in engine characteristics of image output devices on a network and by changes in the environment and change with time, thereby making it possible to optimize connectivity, achieve stable reproduction and improve image quality.

FIG. 1

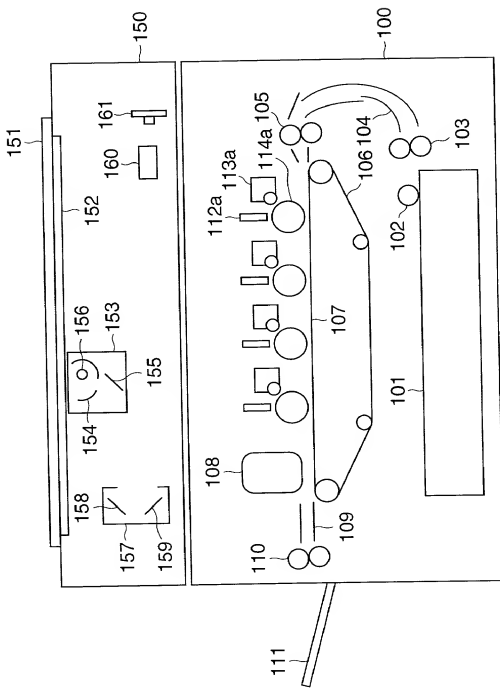


FIG. 2

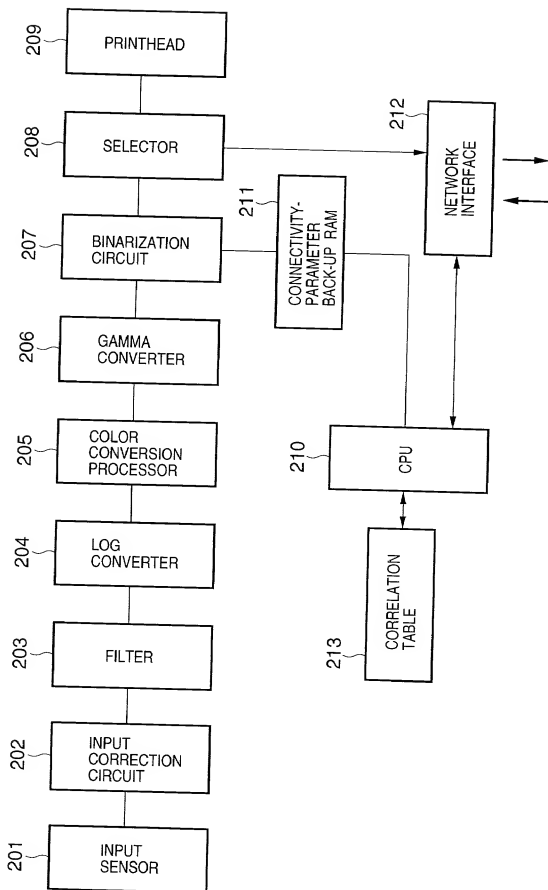


FIG. 3

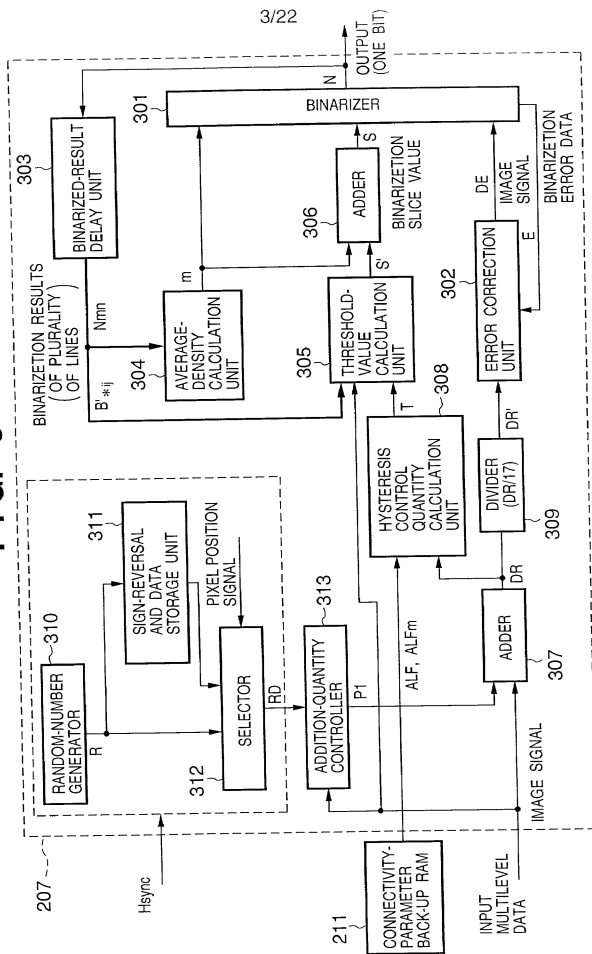


FIG. 4

308

```

if( DR ≤ LR1 ){
    || = 0;
}
else if( LR1 < DR && DR ≤ LR2 ){
    || = ( DR - LR1 ) * ( ALF * 256 / ( LR2 - LR1 ) ) / 256;
}
else if( LR2 < DR && DR ≤ LR3 ){
    || = ALF;
}
else if( LR3 < DR && DR ≤ LR4 ){
    || = ALF - ( ( DR - LR3 ) * ( ALF * 256 / ( LR4 - LR3 ) ) / 256;
}
else{
    || = 0;
}
T = || - ALFm

```

※ SETTINGS BY CPU

LR1 : CONSTANT(16)
 LR2 : CONSTANT(48)
 LR3 : CONSTANT(223)
 LR4 : CONSTANT(225)

※ INPUT FROM BACK-UP
RAM 211

ALF : CONSTANT(32)
 ALFm : CONSTANT(16)

FIG. 5

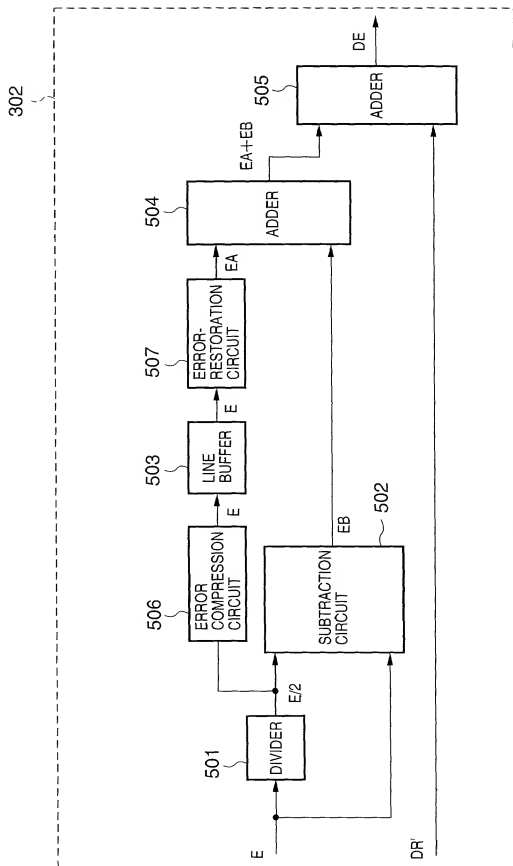


FIG. 7

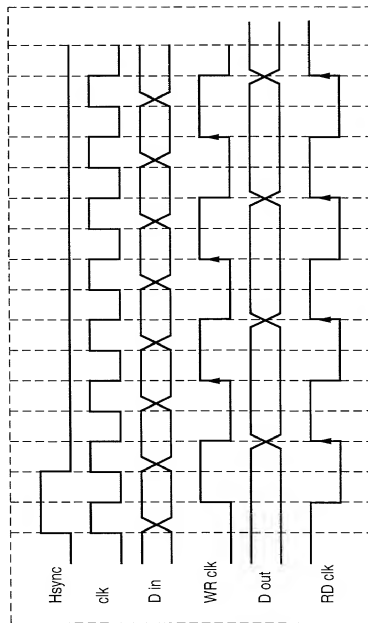


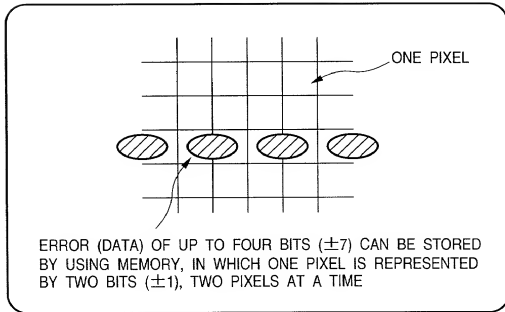
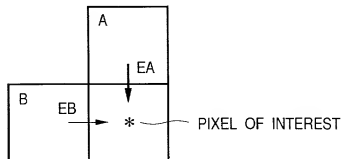
FIG. 8**FIG. 9**

FIG. 10

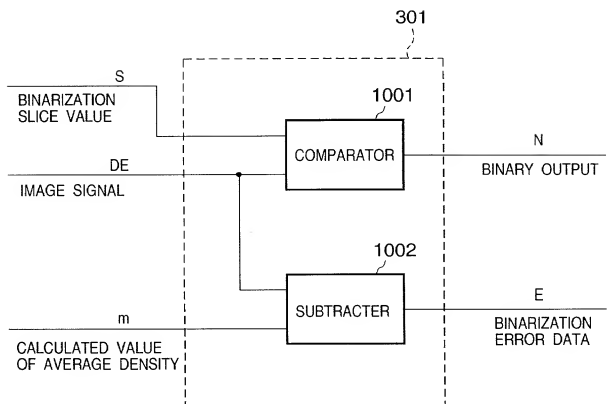


FIG. 11

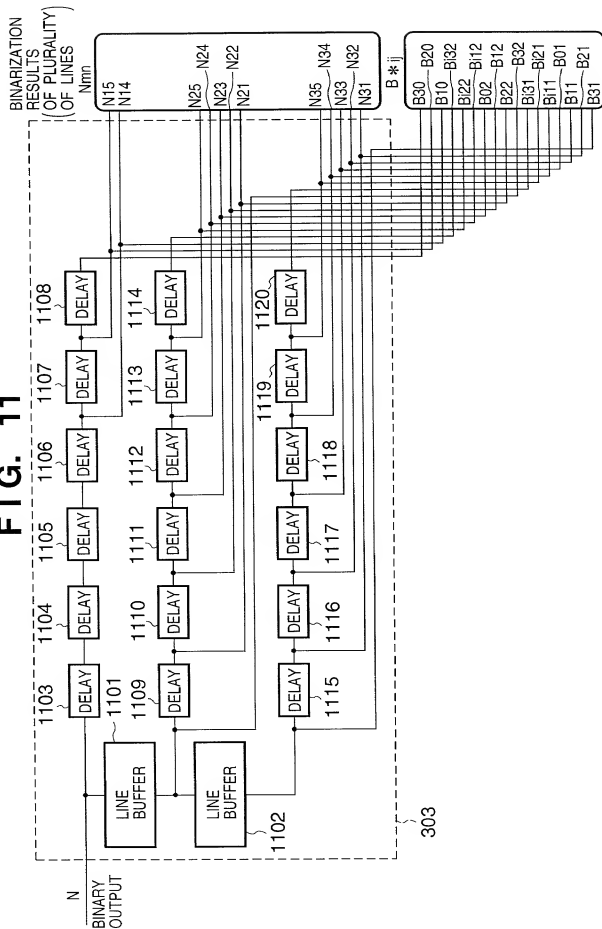
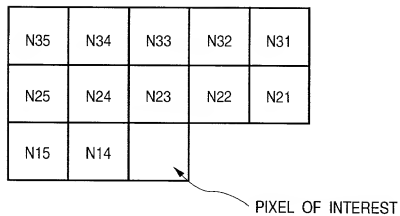


FIG. 12

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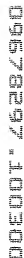


FIG. 14

M35	M34	M33	M32	M31
M25	M24	M23	M22	M21
M15	M14			


 PIXEL OF INTEREST

$$M35 = M34 = M32 = M31 = M25 = 0$$

$$M33 = M21 = M15 = 1$$

$$M24 = M22 = 2$$

$$M23 = M14 = 4$$

FIG. 15

305

```

A=T/LT1;
B=T/LT2;

if((B32==0 && B22==1 && B12==0 && B21==0 && B11==1 && B01==0){
    S'=15;
}
else if((B12==0 && Bi22==1 && Bi32==0 && B01==0 && Bi11==1 && Bi21==0){
    S'=15;
}
else if((B12==0 && B02==0 && Bi12==0 && Bi22==0 && Bi32==0
    && B11==0 && B01==0 && Bi11==1 && Bi12==0 && Bi31==0 && B20==0){
    if(D<31){S'=15; }
    else{ S'=0; }
}
else if((B32==0 && B22==0 && B12==0 && B02==0 && Bi12==0
    && B31==0 && B21==0 && B11==1 && B01==0 && Bi11==0 && B20==0){
    if(D<31){S'=15; }
    else{ S'=0; }
}
else if((B02==0 && Bi12==0 && B11==0 && B01==1 && Bi11==1 && Bi21==0 && B20==0){
    S'=-A;
}
else if((B02==0 || Bi12==0) && B11==0 && B01==1 && Bi11==1 && Bi21==0){
    S'=-B;
}
else if((B12==0 && B02==0 && B21==0 && B11==1 && B01==1 && Bi11==0 && B20==0){
    S'=-A;
}
else if((B12==0 || B02==0) && B21==0 && B11==1 && B01==1 && Bi11==0){
    S'=-B;
}
else if((B12==0 && B02==0 && B21==0 && Bi11==0 && Bi21==0 && B20==0){
    S'=-A;
}
else if((B12==0 && B02==1 && Bi12==0 && B21==0 && B11==1 && B01==0){
    S'=-B;
}
else{
    S'=0;
}

```

※

LT1 : CONSTANT(2)
 LT2 : CONSTANT(4)
 LT3 : CONSTANT(8)
 LT4 : CONSTANT(16)

FIG. 16

B32	B22	B12	B02	Bi12	Bi22	Bi32
B31	B21	B11	B01	Bi11	Bi21	Bi31
B30	B20					

PIXEL OF INTEREST

FIG. 17

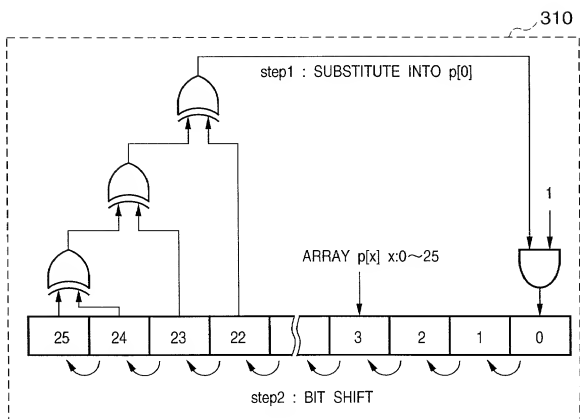
306

```

if(S==15){ S = S'; }
else{      S = S' + m; }

```

FIG. 18



310

```
for(ii = 25; ii ≥ 0; --ii){p[ii] = 0; }
p[12] = 1;
```

```
p[0] = ( p[25]^p[24]^p[23]^p[22] ) & 1;
for(k = 24; k ≥ 0; --k){
    p[k+1] = p[k];
}
```

GENERATED RANDOM NUMBER
 $-17 \leq \text{RANDOM NUMBER} \leq 17$

FIG. 20

313

```

if(D≤N1){
  P1=RD/SL;
}
else if( (N1<D) && (D≤N2) ){
  P1=(RD-RD/SL) * (D-N1)/(N2-N1)+RD/SL;
}
else if( (N3≤D) && (D<N4) ){
  P1=(RD-RD/SL) * (N4-D)/(N4-N3)+RD/SL;
}
else if(N4≤D){
  P1=RD/SL;
}
else {
  P1=RD;
}

```

※ DISCHARGE ALL RESULTS OF DIVISION

FIG. 21

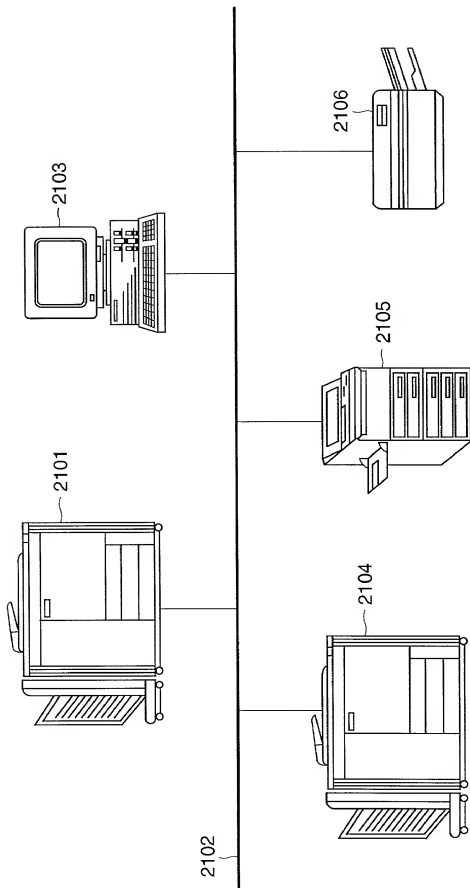


FIG. 22

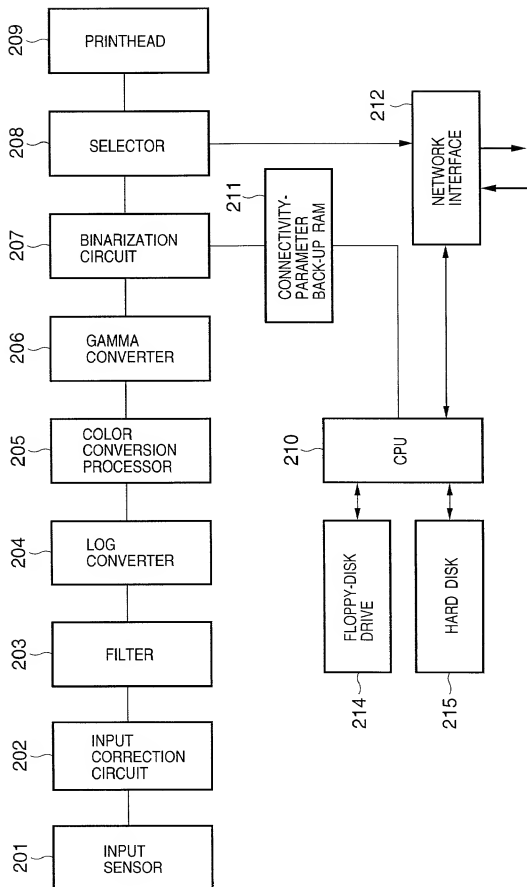


FIG. 23

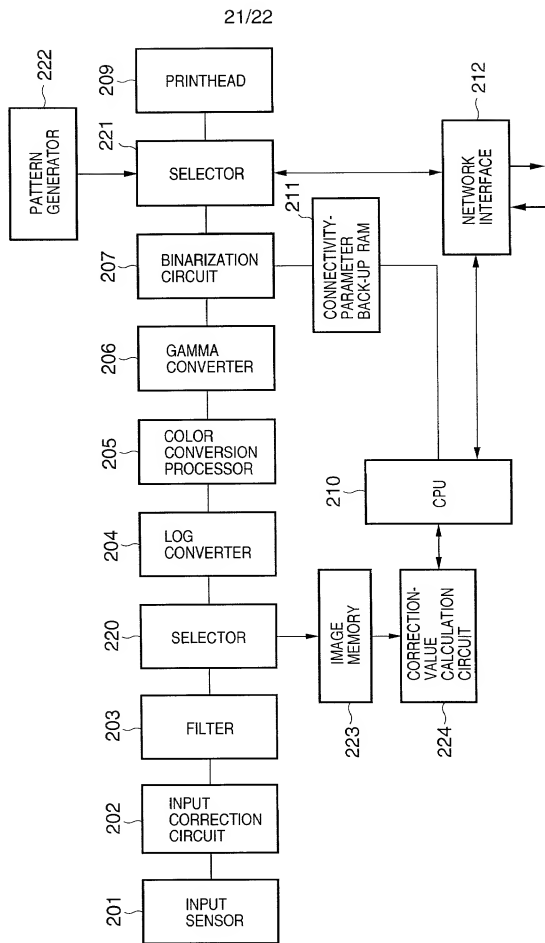
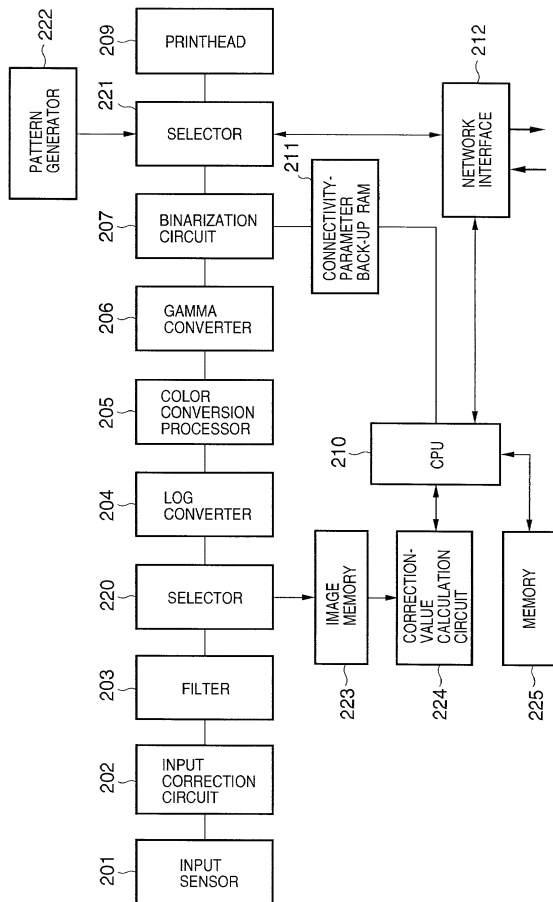


FIG. 24



COMBINED DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY FOR PATENT APPLICATION

(Page 1)

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare that:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name;

I believe I am the original, first and sole inventor (if only one name is listed below) or an original, first and joint inventor (if plural names are listed below) of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled

IMAGE PROCESSING METHOD AND APPARATUS

the specification of which [x] is attached hereto. [] was filed on _____

as United States Application No. or PCT International Application No. _____
and was amended on _____ (if applicable).

I hereby state that I have reviewed and understand the contents of the above-identified specification, including the claims, as amended by any amendment referred to above.

I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR §1.56.

I hereby claim foreign priority benefits under 35 U.S.C. §119(a)-(d) or §365(b), of any foreign application(s) for patent or inventor's certificate, or §365(a) of any PCT international application which designates at least one country other than the United States, listed below and have also identified below any foreign application for patent or inventor's certificate, or PCT international application having a filing date before that of the application on which priority is claimed:

<u>Country</u>	<u>Application No.</u>	<u>Filed (Day/Mo./Yr.)</u>	(Yes/No) <u>Priority Claimed</u>
JAPAN	11-287128	07/10/1999	Yes

I hereby appoint the practitioners associated with the firm and customer number provided below to prosecute this application and to transact all business in the Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith, and direct that all correspondence be addressed to the address associated with that Customer Number:

FITZPATRICK, CELLA, HARPER & SCINTO
Customer Number: 05514

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issued thereon.

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COMBINED DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY
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(Page 2)

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